



ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.

November 5th, 1971.

Dear Friend and Member,

The regular monthly meeting of the Society will be held as follows:-

Date:- Friday evening, November 19th, 1971, at 8 p.m.

Place:- Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Syllabus Item:- Slides taken by Members:-

- (1) Harbour Cruise, September, 1970.
- (2) Week-end Tour, Wellington & Gulgong, October, 1970.
- (3) Week-end Tour, Braidwood, October, 1971.

These slides should be very interesting and entertaining.

Business:- General.

Supper Roster:- Mrs. Chase, Capt., Misses Binns, Russell & Row,
Mesdames McDonald and O'Meara.

Would ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. J. Stead,
PRESIDENT.

Phone: 59-5341

Mrs. E. Eardley,
HON. SECRETARY.

Phone: 59-8078

Mr. A. Ellis,
RESEARCH OFFICER.

Phone: 587-1159

Food for Thought.

Co-operation is a word that's worthy of our thought,
By that alone can we all gain the Friendship long sought;
Each one has their part to play, each one can hope to shine,
But the one who leads most surely needs the other Ninety-Nine.

ITEMS OF INTEREST:

It has been suggested that the RAFFLE for our December Meeting be in the form of a Christmas Hamper. The proceeds will go to the Lydham Hall Fund.

We have been promised, as the first prize, a Christmas Dinner, complete with all the trimmings. For the second and third prizes, which will make the effort worthwhile, we must rely on the generosity of our Members. To this end we ask you to donate suitable inexpensive items.

On Sunday, October 17th, a visit to Lydham Hall was made by some 70/80 R.A.H.S. Conference Delegates who came from all parts of N.S.W., and one from West Australia. Lydham Hall really looked wonderful to Members who have donated or loaned items, by the remarks made you should feel very proud.

After the Mayor, Alderman R. Rathbone, Mrs. Long, Mrs. Stead and Mr. Sinclair had conducted the visitors through the Home, morning tea was served by Members of the St. George Historical Society and the Ladies of the Fund Raising Committee.

To one and all "THANK YOU" for the wonderful response; the scones, cakes and pikelets were great. I could not believe my eyes.

A job well done.

D. Prebble.
President,
Lydham Hall Fund Raising Committee.

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We would like to thank Members and Friends for the following "Recent Acquisitions" to "Lydham Hall", most of which are around 80 years to 100 years old.

Pair of Ruby Glass Embossed Vases.
Pewter Quarter Measure, marked V.R.
Replica of Lands End Lighthouse. This is cut from Serpentine rock which came from the extreme South West Tip of Southern England.

(On loan)

Misses E. & M. Cheetham, Bexley.

China Tea Strainer, 1907 - Originally from Scotland.

A gift from Mrs. A. McDonald, Rockdale.

A five piece Rosewood Sitting Room Suite, upholstered in Green Brocade, and in original condition, was presented to Lydham Hall by Mr. Dickin, 86 Barnsbury Grove, Bardwell Park. This beautiful suite was made by Mr. Dickin's Grandfather, Furniture Maker, in the mid 1880's. A Germanicum Table Lamp (oil) about the same vintage was also donated by Mr. Dickin, Bardwell Park.

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A Pedestal,
Silver Teapot, (80 years old)
Rose Glass Epergne (80 years old)
Embossed Decanter and Glass, both inscribed, 90-95 years old.

Miss Thomas, M.B.E., Bexley.

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By courtesy of "The North Shore Cavalcade Group", a dress which originally belonged to, and was worn by Mrs. Lydia Richardson, formerly of "Wickham", Rocky Point Road, Arncliffe, well before the turn of the century, will be made available to the Society. This dress, which is very fragile, will be displayed at Lydham Hall for a period of time.

There is need for the following items to complete the ensemble:-

Parasol,

Mittens,

Bonnet and Hair, which, if available, will be dressed to suit the period, and also a little Dolly Bag type of purse to hang over the arm of the model.

Can you help? or do you know where any of these items can be obtained?

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Have you any interesting old China, Glass or Silverware; old Documents or Odds and Ends that you would like to display at Lydham Hall? There is still a place for these behind glass.

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REMINISCENCES OF ROCKDALE AT THE 1900 PERIOD.

C. W. Napper.

I have been requested to present a description of the affairs of Rockdale in the early days of my youth, which, so I have been informed, would be of interest to my fellow members of the St. George Historical Society. On a first things first basis, I must mention that I was born in 1887 at Ulmarra, a village near the Clarence River some thirteen miles north-east of Grafton on the North Coast of New South Wales. My father, James Napper, had taken over a farming property at Ulmarra where he was principally engaged with the growing of maize. Unfortunately a series of disastrous floods ruined his prospects in this district, and, during 1892, James Napper, his wife and his family of two sons and two daughters, returned to live at Rockdale. Here a cottage was obtained in West Botany Street and James Napper, in conjunction with Mr. Bowmer, established a produce business on the apex portion of the Wesleyan Church (now Methodist) property at the southern side of the intersection of Bay Street with Rocky Point Road.

My early schooling was undertaken at Rockdale Superior Public School, established on the crest of Rockdale Hill, and tuition lasted until I reached the age of thirteen years. During this period I was a regular attendant at the West Botany Wesleyan Sunday School and still retain pleasant memories of the annual Sunday School Picnic held in the spacious grounds of the Sans Souci Hotel at Rocky Point. It was a great day indeed with the trials associated with the organisation of such an important event. The local market gardeners sited around the agricultural flats of Muddy Creek cleaned out and refurbished their two-wheeled carts, usually spoken of as "Dung-carts" for obvious reasons, and provided extra seating accommodation to each vehicle, said seats consisting of a somewhat thin and narrow plank, fitted with end stops, resting on the side-boards of the vehicle, the cherished seat being at the back where we kids could dangle and kick our legs over the tailboard. Then, in procession, the carts, up to ten in number, would wend their way along Bay Street to Rocky Point Road, the children singing, and the nags prancing. Rocky Point Road was followed southward, down to Skidmore's Bridge over Muddy Creek, up Skidmore's Hill, past the few shops of old-time Kogarah and the two storied Gardener's Arms Hotel, then the climb up Fitzgerald's Hill, followed by the climb up Clark's Hill to Ramsgate, after which the way was downhill, easy on the horses, through bush country to the excitements of Rocky Point and its pleasure ground. Occasionally the Sans Souci Steam Tram would pass our cavalcade, the engine driver giving a screaming whistle of goodwill as the steam-motor rumbled past.

At the pleasure-ground the carts were lined against the fence, the horses out-spanned and tethered, and also given the consolation of their feed-bags of chaff, together with buckets of water to wash it down. Meanwhile the children were assembled and mustered into age groups to receive small bags of boiled lollies and a cup of lemon syrup, ladled out of wash-tubs and galvanised iron buckets. This syrupy concoction was sweet to taste and manufactured at home on the stove from boiling water, sugar, tartaric acid, and essence of lemon was added when the mixture cooled. The resulting liquid was broken down liberally with cold water and was

greatly appreciated. However, it is related that an Irish Sunday School teacher, in his desire to be of help, espied a couple of buckets full of the undiluted mixture, which he mistook for dirty water and promptly threw the cordial out onto the grass, much to the mortification of the ladies' committee and the ever thirsty children.

A diversion occurred when an adult male member of the committee donned an old full-length if somewhat derelict night-gown, as worn at the time by elderly females, onto which several calico bags of lollies had been sewn. In this cumbersome garb the man commenced to run and was chased by swarms of the younger fry, all intent in wresting the coveted lolly bags, and great was the joy when the man fell over and in the ensuing all-in scrum he was divested of the lolly bags and most of his nightgown. Mr. Joseph Bowmer entertained the older children by bowling a coconut along the ground. This was chased by a number of teams on a competitive basis, the winning team gained the unbroken nut.

There were plenty of competitors for the "Three-legged Race" in which it was usual to combine the efforts of a boy and a girl, or, perhaps, a man and his wife, if they won it was regarded as a good omen for their future married happiness. The "Egg and Spoon Race" was also most popular, big eggs and small spoons, coupled with the roughness of the turf, created many hazards for the players, only the onlookers laughed. There were foot-races for both girls and boys, all sorted into age groups, rather than size and stamina. The various prizes awarded to the winners of these events included pen-knives for boys and handkerchiefs for the girls. These items were donated for the most part, by friends of the Sunday School administration. It was always a very tired, but very happy, cortege which wended its way homewards at the conclusion of a most exciting day.

Another great event of my early days was the annual sports carnival, proceeds of which were donated to the St. George Cottage Hospital at Kogarah. This was quite a feature about the turn of the century. The Prince of Wales Birthday, kept with due ceremony on November 9th, was chosen for this gala outing and a street procession left Rockdale Town Hall to pass southwards through the Rockdale business centre and follow Rocky Point Road (now Princes Highway) down to Skidmore's Bridge and up Skidmore's Hill to eventually reach the Moorefield Racecourse enclosure. Music for the procession was furnished by the St. George District Band and also by the Rockdale Fire Brigade brass band.

The procession was regarded by the local business men as a great advertising medium and, as most of the shopkeepers carried out home deliveries in horse-drawn carts of various kinds, these vehicles were newly painted for the occasion and elaborately decorated to catch the public eye. Interest was also aroused by the prizes offered for the best turn-out of the day, the best pony and sulky outfit, the most comical, and the worst turn-out of the day. One recalls the entry of an ancient hansom cab, considerably the worse for wear, in which a seemingly bashful bridal couple were ensconced. The bride wore a veil made from a hessian chaff-bag whilst the groom was attired in a frock coat cut from the same material, his top-hat had certainly seen better days. On the back of the cab was a placard which read "At Trinity Church we met our Doom".

My father, the local produce merchant at Rockdale, generally entered the competition by displaying a four-wheeled lorry loaded with various brands of poultry food and also farm produce, all being neatly stacked in terraced rows. A large calico sign, stretched over the length of the cart, displayed a pair of roosters, one at each end, one bird reputedly saying "We have something to crow about - our food comes from Napper's". Tied behind the lorry were two horses, one a lovely big black horse, groomed and polished "until you could almost see yourself reflected in his curvaceous body". He carried a sign aloft which stated "Fed on Napper's Feed". The other horse, the poorest and skinniest nag that my father could find, bore the sign "I wish mine did".

It was certainly a grand sight to see the horses trotting gaily along, each with its harness polished with neatsfoot oil and rubbed till shiny with "Black Fat", a semi-liquid substance contained in tins. Some horses had head ornaments in the way of brightly coloured tufts, and the collars of others were set off with tinkling silver "horse-bells" which made a merry sound as they paced along, much to the admiration of the crowds thronging the roadside.

After the vehicle judging had been completed and winners announced at the racecourse enclosure known as the Saddling Paddock, various sporting events were held. One great feature was the "LAST HORSE RACE", in which a large number of old nags appeared, the last horse to appear at the post being declared the winner. The field was lined in a row, but before starting the amateur jockeys were changed, so that the horse each one was riding belonged to someone else and was urged to do its best, thus giving their own nags a good chance to come home at the tail end of the field. A very well thought out arrangement. Whips or spurs were not permitted but most of the would-be jockeys discarded their coats, or shirts, to belabour their steeds into some form of spirited action, to the amusement of the onlookers who spurred them on with choice and often ribald badinage.

Another race was named "THE UMBRELLA AND CIGAR RACE", in which the riders held aloft an open umbrella and smoked a cigar, both items had to be in their appointed positions at the finish. There was the keenly contested "INTER-SCHOOL TUG-OF-WAR", and numerous competitions for the ladies, and more of the rougher kind for the men and boys. The Prince of Wales Birthday was certainly a day to be remembered.

One of the civic problems of my boyhood was the great number of dogs which roved at will and fouled the streets at their leisure. This circumstance led one of the leading drapers of Rockdale, Charlie Barsby, to engage a boy on Saturday afternoons to parade the footpath outside his shop situated at the north-eastern corner of Bay Street and Rocky Point Road in an attempt to distract the attentions of the canine family from the rolls of cloth displayed outside the store. This young gentleman was provided with a cane and also a shilling for his services and justly earned the nickname of "Billy the Dog Wolloper".

Charlie Barsby was also troubled with the ever-present road dust which rose in eye-filling clouds when the westerly winds gathered force. One Christmas Eve conditions were so bad that he went to the

local Chinese market gardeners and was successful in hiring two of these gentlemen to bring their shoulder yokes and huge watering cans to lay the dust outside his shop, thereby shaming the Rockdale Municipal Council into purchasing a two-wheeled watering cart, consisting of a large white-painted wooden barrel and a sparge pipe at the rear. This vehicle paraded the business centre of Rockdale and made conditions liveable.

Throughout the year there was a regular parade of street hawkers traversing the streets and back lanes of the Rockdale area, some with baskets and others aboard two-wheeled carts of all manner of designs. There was the "Bottle-oh" who paid one half-penny each for empty beer bottles and a penny a dozen for other varieties of sauce, medicine or soft drink bottles. We kids used to scrounge around the houses collecting a few bottles here and there to "raise the wind" for a feed of ice cream. The "Bottle-oh" in person usually stood upright in his two-wheeled spring-cart, one hand holding the reins, and the other to his lips to guide the sound of his voice, reciting "Any Empty Bottles" to the right quarters. Another familiar street cry was "WILD RABBIT OH", uttered by a gentleman who also rode in a small spring cart, with his wares tied by their back legs in pairs and draped over the side and back boards of the vehicle. His fresh trapped rabbits sold for eighteen-pence the pair, and were skinned in front of the customer and her cats, the latter receiving odd tid-bits from the tiny carcasses which were greatly appreciated. On Mondays in particular, for obvious reasons, the "CLOTHES PROP MAN" drove his horse and cart through the back lanes incessantly calling out "Clothes Props, Clothes Props" from the front of his "horse-breaking" vehicle, chosen because the horse was well forward in the long shafts. For one with a mechanical mind the backyard clothes line was always worthy of notice, particularly if the housewife had been making temporary repairs to its structural arrangements.

Other regular callers included the "Egg and Butter Man" and the fruit and vegetable merchant who came to the backdoor of the residences with a small hand-basket displaying samples of his wares. The Chinese gardeners also were engaged in this latter trading, some trundling along the streets with two heavy cane baskets, dangling by cords from the outer ends of a shoulder yoke, the leading basket containing fruit and the rear full of vegetables. The more prosperous Chinese rode their rounds in two-wheeled spring carts, with a split-open corn-sack spread-eagled by cords beneath the vehicle to accommodate potatoes, onions, swedes and suchlike root vegetables. One wily Celestial made it a practice of throwing an apple or a peach to small children playing in the street and telling them to go and inform their mothers that Charlie the Chinaman was outside with plenty of cheap fruit and vegetables. His initial kindness and forethought generally brought good financial results.

It is passing strange that Rockdale was comparatively free from the larrikin element who were present in the streets of most suburbs. Inebriation, however, was somewhat rife with beer selling at 3d. per pint, two pints of the then potent brew was seemingly sufficient to give the imbibers a feeling of elation, a desire to sing, and an instability of gait. Without a doubt the best temperance method adopted was the reduction of the alcoholic contents of the beer, plus the extortionate costs charged at the present day

for a greatly inferior chemicalised product.

The streets were crowded on the late Saturday shopping night when it was difficult to move along the footpaths and horses were liable to kick or bite you on the roads. The St. George District Band played popular tunes, waltzes and marches, moving from place to place according to the donations given them by the various tradespeople. Music was also provided by the Rockdale Fire Brigade Band, and the Salvation Army held their public meetings, generally on Rocky Point Road in the immediate vicinity of the Bay Street intersection. Their brass band and members of both sexes would form a wide circle with the Army flag spread on the road as a centre-piece. There was preaching and testifying, the thum, thum, thum of the big bass drum, the lilting music of the cornets, and the din, din, din of the whirling tambourines, the unaccompanied singing of hymns, and the solicitation of alms, seeking sufficient small coins to make a total of one shilling, and then onwards to two shillings and so on and so forth. Infidels standing around outside the circle have been known to heat halfpence on top of the bowl of their lighted pipes and then flick the coin onto the waiting flag. Here an attempt would be made by the Officer-in-charge to pick it up, much to his discomfiture. The late Jack Carter of Arncliffe related that on one occasion the coin heating process was witnessed by an Army lass, and when the coin was thrown, quick as a flash, she picked it up and threw it in the open-necked shirt of the donor who, in turn, provided considerable enjoyment in his writhings and contortions, both to the highly amused Army personnel and the foregathering of infidels.

There would also be political and municipal speakers, mounted on soap boxes and surrounded by small oil flares smoking horribly at the end of a broom-stick. Religious groups, of sparse numbers, discoursed on the evils of the day, the lack of justice, and the terrors of Hell. They often lacked an audience apart from children minding the baby seated in its go-cart, who were well aware of judgement, swift and terrible, if they strayed away from the shop-front. There was a vacant block of land at the rear of the Royal Hotel which was utilised on Saturday nights to present an open-air concert, weather conditions permitting. A stage was erected and temporary seats were available at a small charge. The younger members of the audience perched on the narrow edge of the top rail of a post and rail fence as best as they may. As 10 o'clock approached the crowd gradually dwindled and many sore-footed people wended their way home through the silent gas-lit streets.

In conclusion it is fitting to mention the greatest event of my life, the day on which I married Lily May Spackman who lived at Done Street, Arncliffe, her house being against the somewhat noisy steam tram depot at the northern end of the railway station. On a wage of forty-five shillings per week we could not afford a honeymoon so I took two days off duty from my father's produce store. My first job on my wedding day, (Wednesday, September 20th, 1911) was to borrow dad's horse and delivery cart and convey trestle tables and seating forms from the West Botany Street Methodist Church to the St. George District Band Hall situated in Cameron Street, Rockdale. This latter building, incidentally, is now in use as a dry-cleaning establishment. The second day was occupied in returning the forms and trestle tables to the place from whence they came.

A hansom cab was hired to bring Miss Spackman to the church for the wedding ceremony, after which Pius Walz, the cab driver, sporting a garlanded whip bedecked with white ribbons, took my wife and myself for a "time-killing" trip to Brighton le Sands, thence along The Grand Parade to President Avenue and Rocky Point Road, the final jaunt being along Bay Street to the Band Hall and its festivities. Meanwhile the guests walked the half-mile or so from the church to the hall, threading their way for the most part via the short cut across Mr. Quirk's cow paddock, a traverse that needed much circumspection as ladies' dresses then trailed at ground level and the patent leather boots of the menfolk betrayed dirt to its fullest advantage. It might be mentioned that the Rev. W.E. Bourne, although retired from the ministry at that time, came down from his home at Bexley, aboard his four-wheeled buggy, to officiate at the wedding ceremony.

In due course our union was blessed with seven sons and it was stated that Bill Napper, in the interests of boot leather economy, taught his children to take long steps when walking. Over the years we have amassed seven daughters-in-law, fourteen grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. We are both pleased to announce that we celebrated our Diamond Wedding on Saturday, September 18th, 1971, after sixty years of happy married bliss, at the former West Botany Street Methodist Church, which is now in use as a Sunday School Hall. Here we were entertained by fifty-two members of our large family group, all of whom, like ourselves, have descended from Charles Napper, one of the early pioneers of Muddy Creek, near present-day Rockdale.

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